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## Interpreting prisoners-of-war : Sketches of a military translation culture in Finnish POW camps during World War II (1941-1944)

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### Abstract

*In the four years of Finland's Continuation War against the USSR, Finnish troops captured 67,000 Soviet prisoners-of-war who were handled behind lines in an extended network of POW formations. Drawing from archived correspondence between the responsible military administration and the POW camp commanders, the article analyses the resources allocated for the management of communication issues as well as the discourses concerning the interpreter's tasks, role, trustworthiness, and positioning in the strenuous and violent conditions of POW camps.*

*Key words: Microhistory; translation history; World War II; Translation culture; interpreting; prisoners-of-war; trust*

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**Pekka Kujamäki & Päivi Pasanen**

## Interpreting prisoners-of-war

### Sketches of a military translation culture in the Finnish POW camps during World War II (1941-1944)

#### Introduction

This paper gives a microhistorical account of interpreters and interpreting arrangements in Finnish prisoner-of-war camps during the Continuation War (1941-44), one of the three military conflicts that Finland was involved in during World War II. In this war following the Winter War (1939-40) and a short interim peace, Finland joined the German Operation Barbarossa against the Red Army and formed a military alliance with the 'Third Reich' which operated from Finland with more than 200,000 soldiers (for details see e.g. VEHVILÄINEN 1987; JONAS 2011). After Finland's disengagement from the war in autumn 1944, the alliance turned into a confrontation, the so-called Lapland War, as the peace terms imposed by the USSR dictated that Finnish troops must drive the German forces out of Finnish territory. Our focus is on the resourcing of Finnish POW camps with Russian speaking interpreters in the Continuation War and on the question of how the Finnish POW administration reacted to the multilingualism of POW camps and to the language-mediation needs in the camp routines.

The violence and conflicting narratives of military confrontations often conceal the linguistic and cultural spaces in which the adversary cultures and nations intertwine. More often than not, military history focuses on nations, politics, strategies and "great men" of wars, paying little attention to languages, communication and translational events. Yet, as soon as we start to ask questions about the specific (cultural, ethnic, national) composition of given military forces or alliances, about the geopolitical space and goals of the given operation, or about features of encounters in different operational contexts, "places of languages" and mediation begin to emerge. (Cf. FOOTITT 2012a: 222 and her discussion on the method of "following the 'translation' of languages in war situations".) Different stages of war (from declaration of war to peace negotiations) or military operations (e.g. surveillance, propaganda, coordination of campaigns between the allies, interrogation of captured enemies) represent themselves as cultural, political and linguistic encounters, in which mediation by "marginal" and "ordinary people" can be assumed to constitute an indispensable part of their communicative structures (ADAMO 2006; MUNDAY 2014).

The idea of "translatedness" of wars as well as the micro-historical interest in the lives of mediators frame the Finnish research project *In Search of Military Translation Cultures* that the present paper is based upon. Its interest is in the role of foreign languages in the three wars mentioned above as well as in the language policies and

practices of their mediation spaces.<sup>1</sup> In the project, such spaces include the Finnish-German military alliance with encounters between the Finnish and German military and Finnish civilians and German soldiers (KUJAMÄKI 2016 and 2017), the Finnish Headquarters as a multilingual space (SYRJÄNEN 2014) or the handling of prisoner-of-wars on both sides of the front (PASANEN 2012; PROBIRSKAJA 2016). The project has benefited from research on interpreting and translating in different historical and geopolitical settings. These include for example the Allied coalition in the Great War (HEIMBURGER 2012), the occupied Germany after World War II (FOOTITT/TOBIA 2013), military operations during the Pacific War (Takeda 2009), the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (DRAGOVIC-DROUET 2007; STAHULJAK 2000; KELLY/BAKER 2012), or in the more recent geopolitical arenas (BAKER 2006; INGHILLERI 2008). The research has not only highlighted the significance of translational activities in wars and conflicts, but also discussed thoroughly issues such as trust, ethics and cultural identity of people engaged in mediation tasks as constrained by the specific circumstances of wars. (For a further overview, see INGHILLERI/HARDING 2010.)

As already indicated by the project title, in the Finnish project the mediation spaces with their practices and arrangements are described in terms of “translation cultures”. Erich Prunč's concept (in German ‘Translationskultur’, PRUNČ 1997) aims at identifying the socially determined norms, conventions, expectations and values which define language mediation in a given social space. In the study of language-mediation practices in war, the concept outlines both the official framework for military language mediation and the personal objectives and views of the translators and interpreters working on the front, on military staff or in POW formations. The work of translators and interpreters during conflicts and war can thus be analysed from at least two perspectives. On the one hand, there is the official dimension in which the general framework, aims and expectations of language mediation are set by international agreements on warfare, national legislation and government actions, particularly military authorities (including political high command). On the other hand, there is the everyday experience, the language mediation front-line and grass-roots practices, which either fit into the official framework or are placed unintentionally (forced by circumstances) or intentionally (urged by circumstances) out of bounds. (For a similar division between “policies” and “practices” in the project *Languages at War*, see e.g. FOOTITT 2012a.) The discrepancies and convergences between the two dimensions and their effects shape our analysis of interpreting in the Finnish POW formations, as well.

### **Imprisonment as a cultural and linguistic encounter**

In the reconstruction of “military translation cultures”, interpreting at Finnish prisoner-of-war camps comprises an essential part of the project, in much the same way

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<sup>1</sup> The project was supported during the years 2011-2015 by the Academy of Finland under Grant SA 138 221, Research Council for Culture and Society. We also thank Anne Rivinoja and Kathy Saranpa for their assistance at different stages of this paper.

as “imprisonment is the inevitable and persistent companion of every war” (FROLOV 2004: 7; our transl.). Prisoners are taken in wars to reduce the power of the enemy but also because the prisoners are beneficial to their capturers in many ways – as sources of information, labour force, hostages, examples of good treatment to comrades still fighting, ways to influence future domestic policies and as a shield (cf. FERGUSON 2003: 416–445; DANIELSBACKA 2013: 35).

Acquiring intelligence is the most obvious use of POWs, as information on enemy troops and their technology, their spirits and the enemy society helps in planning future military operations. Interrogating POWs for intelligence is also one of the few contexts in which research on Finnish military history briefly touches upon issues of communication and language competence in the military, and particularly the importance of interpreters for the quality of interrogation intelligence. In his diploma thesis at the National Defence University Jari Manelius (1993) studied the interrogation of POWs in Finland and the USSR and revealed the vitality of interpreters on both sides of the front. According to Manelius, the Red Army did not experience any shortage of Finnish-speaking interpreters, whereas in Finland, the shortage of interrogators and interpreters and their low level of training were a problem, especially during the Winter War. As a result, the military did not obtain intelligence that would have been vital to the troops fighting on the front (cf. MANELIUS 1993: 51). During the Continuation War, however, the circumstances for interrogating POWs were better because both the number of Russian-speaking interpreters and the amount of instruction were increased (cf. MANELIUS 1993: 54).

Manelius’ reflections, however, consider only one aspect of imprisonment and handling of POWs in Finland and sidelines the actual need for mediators in the space between capture, interrogation and death or possible release that contained months or years of custody in different POW formations. During the Continuation War, the number of Soviet prisoners-of-war in Finland reached 67,000, a number that called for massive organisational measures behind the lines. As estimated by Westerlund (2008b: 278), “in Finland and in territories occupied by the Finns” there was a temporary network of 3,350 work sites, POW camps, sub-camps and hospitals. This network required from both the military leadership and the lower structures a wealth of decisions determining the treatment of POWs and the human and economic resources framing it.

In general, these decisions, including the measures required by the multilingualism of POW camps, are made as part of the POW policy of each capturing country. This, in turn, is determined on the one hand by international agreements, and on the other, by the cultural framework of war, the latter of which defines the public attitude towards the enemy and, as a result, the treatment of a POW and the human and economic resources it calls for. Interpreters proficient in the enemy language(s) were an essential part of this resourcing, the importance of which becomes even clearer if we look behind the expression “Soviet prisoner-of-war”. Although it features a handy hypernym for Red Army prisoners in Finnish custody, it simultaneously blurs the cultural “thickness” of wars (BARKAWI 2006: 170), in general, and particularly that of POW formations. Already in November 1941, the Home Troops Staff that was in

charge of the organization and maintenance of POW camps informed the Finnish Headquarters that among the POWs, they had registered Belarussian, Caucasian, Estonian, (Ukrainian and Baltic) German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Spanish and Finno-Ugric “nationalities”.<sup>2</sup>

Bearing the number of prisoners, the scale of the POW camp network as well as the multilingualism of these formations in mind, it comes as no surprise that both the need and resources for interpreters were underestimated from the start. The general assumption was that the war would soon be over. As the boldest even thought that the prisoners could possibly be released before winter 1941-1942, no special attention was paid to the POW issue at the beginning of the war and there was unwillingness to tie large amounts of Finnish personnel to the POW camps (cf. KUJANSUU 2007: 1037). Another apparent reason was the lack of linguistically skilled people fit to act as interpreters, which, as will be discussed further below, seriously challenged the efficiency of camp routines throughout the war and forced camps to engage linguistically versed POWs for mediation of camp orders to their fellow inmates.

### **Tracking the sources**

The Finnish project on translation cultures in the Finnish military contexts has drawn heavily on primary sources (mostly correspondence, war diaries, minutes etc.) in the War Archive of the Finnish Defence Administration. Even today, the archive is available in the original order given by the particular military unit during the wars. In this form, the material is not only abundant but also for the most part unorganized. Moreover, “translators” or “interpreters” usually do not manifest themselves as organizational categories in the folders and particular databases, but information on them is scattered in records of different units. This forces the researcher to follow the military structures, assume interpreted communication and “unearth” (FOOTITT 2012a: 222) interpreting persons and contexts in a very broad archival search.

As regards interpreting in the Finnish POW formations, similar challenges establish themselves by the very nature of the research object. Information on interpreting is scattered in documents of different offices of the Finnish Headquarters, depending on the particular issue at hand, such as maintenance of POW formations (HQ sorting), interrogators on camps (HQ intelligence), or interpreters’ benefits (HQ sorting or General Intendant’s Office). In this specific case, however, the problems of data collection are partly reduced by the fact that from the beginning of the Continuation War, the management of POW issues was in the responsibility of one military office, the Prisoner-of-War office of the Home Troops Staff (HTS). The archive of this office documents its role as the central node in the network of POW formations. It reflects the stages of imprisonment, i.e. capture and first interrogations on the front, transfer to sorting camps, registration for the Red Cross and a further transfer to POW camps, hospitals or work sites and, finally, repatriation at the end of the war.

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<sup>2</sup> Home Troops Staff (HTS) 6.11.41. *Kotij.E:n sotavankitston kirjeistö* [‘Home Troops Staff, POW office correspondence’, *HTS-POC*], 24.10-11.11.1941, Fa 6/VIIa/2, KA.



The present analysis draws on the archive of incoming and outgoing mail of the POW office. The most important part of the material comes from the particular folder sections (Nr. 5), dealing with matters relating to interpreting in POW formations, especially from the beginning of the Continuation War in summer and fall 1941 when the POW formation network was established. It includes, among others, lists about persons suitable for interpreting, draft letters and assignment orders for soldiers or civilians to report for interpreting duties at newly established camps. With the beginning of the trench warfare in the winter of 1942, the number of documents diminishes. This implies that, by then, policies and practices of interpreting in POW had become established, and negotiations on these human resources and their agency was no longer necessary. However, there is also the possibility that parts of the records are simply missing, as in the last months of the war parts of archives were deliberately destroyed (e.g. YLIKANGAS 2015: 68).

Who are the persons whose correspondence we use as a perspective into interpreting in POW formations? In her research on the responsibility issues of the POW mass deaths in Finland, Mirkka Danielsbacka (2013) places the Finns dealing with POW treatment on three levels. On the highest level were the country's political and military command elite whose attitude towards the POW issue was framed by ideological views as well the international balancing both in relation to German brothers-in-war and the Allied. The second level is the “bureaucratic” level, that is, the level of the HTS and the HQ officials who actually handled the POW issues and were responsible for the establishment and arrangements of POW camps. On the lowest level were the commanders of POW camps and other personnel dealing with the POWs on a daily basis, for example register clerks, interrogators, guards and interpreters (cf. DANIELSBACKA 2013: 42–43). In relation to this classification, our material is, with a few exceptions, instructive correspondence between the bureaucratic level and the daily operators. In practice, the material depicts the voices of the HTS and the POW camp commanders. A number of orders from the HQ General Intendant's office provide additional information on the interpreting arrangements of POW camps. As such, the material can be seen to include bureaucratic-level views on the central principles of interpreting practices (cf. official framework, above) but also the daily operators' representations of practices dictated by the circumstances or necessary exceptions (everyday experience). The perspective that their views open is a rather narrow prism into interpreting in POW formations, (inter-)subjective, mediated, perhaps even anecdotal. However, as the interpreters themselves are invisible in the particular archive, with these views we get a crucial insight into both circumstances of and expectations towards their agency. It is also a perspective that aligns with the “type of history” we have chosen to tell (MUNDAY 2014: 66). In the micro-historical approach with its reduced scale adopted here (ADAMO 2006: 85), the fragmentary, the anecdotal, and the forgotten take the stage, on which questions such as the following can be asked and answered: Who were chosen or ordered for interpreting in POW formations? Under which conditions? What did their task brief consist of? How does the issue of trust constrain the mediation practice in the myriad context of imprisonment? What is the hierarchical, social and economic position of interpreters that

emerges from the archived records? How did this position develop under the pressure of actual circumstances, for example because of the shortage of linguistically skilled people?

### **Establishing structures, recruiting interpreters**

At the outbreak of the Continuation War in summer 1941, the administrative office of the HQ sorting unit was put in charge of the management of POW issues. In practice, however, the POW issues of the home front were managed by the Home Troops Staff (HTS), which also gave the orders to establish POW camps (cf. KUJANSUU 2007: 1036). The founding orders provided information on the location and number of the camp, assigned its commander, defined the camp personnel strengths divided into officers, NCOs and rank and file, and also mentioned the number of interpreters.<sup>3</sup> According to the planned personnel strength, the number of the POW camp interpreters was in direct relation to the estimated number of prisoners, in other words two interpreters for 500–700 prisoners. For example, the HTS founding order dated 11 September 1941 for POW camp 15 in Suomussalmi states that the personnel strength of the camp included two enlisted interpreters. The total strength was three officers, eight NCOs and 42 rank and file. The camp was intended for 600 prisoners.<sup>4</sup> By mid-July 1941, 16 POW camps and two POW sorting camps had been established in different parts of Finland.<sup>5</sup> The camps were intended for a total of 20,000–24,000 POWs, and thus the calculated need for interpreters was 30–50. Not all camps needed interpreters immediately because, by July 12, there were POWs only in a few POW camps or sorting camps.<sup>6</sup>

At the outbreak of the war in 1941, the tasks of the peacetime military districts were covered by the Civil Guard districts. These were under authority of the HTS and military counties and featured the part of the national defense structures that was responsible for mobilization and other tasks at the home front. On 30 June 1941, the HTS ordered the Civil Guard districts to identify all men known to them who could be used as interpreters. In addition to name, date and place of birth, family relations, hometown and civil vocation, the dispatch was expected to give information on the person's language skills and other possibly relevant facts such as membership in the Civil Guard. Before a person could be assigned as a POW interpreter, the HTS verified his reliability.<sup>7</sup> In the following weeks, the Civil Guard districts delivered the lists of the Russian-speaking men in their region who were willing to interpret at POW camps.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these lists, serving camp interpreters could recommend fur-

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<sup>3</sup> HTS to Civil Guard district (CGD) of southwestern Häme 12.8.1941. *HTS- POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941 Fa 1/1, KA.

<sup>4</sup> HTS 11.9.41. *HTS-POC* 27.8.–29.9.1941, Fa 4/1, KA.

<sup>5</sup> HTS briefing to HQ medical unit 12.7.1941. *HTS- POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941 Fa 1/II/5, KA.

<sup>6</sup> HTS 12.7.41. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1/II/7, KA.

<sup>7</sup> HTS 30.6.41. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1/II/5, KA.

<sup>8</sup> For examples of person lists sent by Civil Guard districts, see *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1/II/5, KA.



ther candidates, or individual persons with sufficient knowledge of Russian would apply for the tasks on their own. Volunteers from home reserves and from the front could occasionally also be engaged, but despite the chronic shortage of interpreters, many of them were denied because of health issues or alcohol abuse. As a rule, however, POW camp interpreters were not recruited from the front.

The requests for reinforcements were carried out through the HTS as well. In July 1941, the POW camps were instructed to acquire the Russian-speaking interpreters needed at the camp through Civil Guard districts from the HTS and at the same time inform it of the persons possibly suitable for such tasks.<sup>9</sup>

Judging by the names on the HTS interpreter lists, many interpreters had their roots outside Finland. Most of them were born Ingrian or Karelian, that is, “Karelian refugees”, as noted frequently next to their names on the interpreter lists. During the Russian revolution and after it in 1917–1922, Russian-speaking people had moved to different parts of Finland from, for example, St. Petersburg and the Karelian Isthmus (cf. SHENSHIN 2008: 40). The second refugee wave in 1939 brought to Finland Karelian evacuees, but also Russians with Finnish citizenship and Russian emigrants, refugees and their progeny who had a permit to reside in Finland. It has been estimated that, between 1917 and 1939, Finland took in from the east at least 44,000 refugees who stayed in Finland for some time or permanently. According to Shenshin (2008: 43), 600–700 Russians living permanently in Finland participated in the Winter War and the Continuation War, some of them as interpreters.

In relation to the actual need, the number of persons reached by the recruitment measures and suitable for interpreting soon proved insufficient. From the very beginning, there was a clear shortage of interpreters, and as it was difficult and time-consuming to find replacements for discharged persons, the camps held onto their interpreters tightly. The situation was the most difficult for the work-site foremen who might have to wait very long for an interpreter if a suitable person was not found amongst the prisoners. For the functionality of all POW formations, the chain of command through different military authorities was occasionally frustratingly winding. The chronic shortage of Russian-speaking personnel in the Finnish POW formations is expressed explicitly in the briefing sent out by Finnish headquarters intelligence in August 1941 to its interrogators:

*As it has turned out that certain POW interrogators have expressed a wish to be released from interrogation duty due to the circumstances regarding lodging and food supply at the POW camps and other such reasons, HQ intelligence is pleading with the POW interrogators, encouraging them to voluntarily continue to perform the interrogation duties they have accepted, unless health reasons are an overbearing obstacle, since there is a severe shortage of Russian-speaking persons.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Kotij.E 3.7.41. HTS-POC 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1, KA.

<sup>10</sup> HQ intelligence to HTS 22.8.1941. HTS-POC 23.6.–11.9.1941 Fa 1, KA. Translations here and throughout ours.

The workload of the interrogators – and undoubtedly also of the interpreters – was at its greatest in fall 1941 at the successful offensive stage of the Continuation War, as the number of POWs grew rapidly. The fully-occupied, over-aged interpreters were soon exhausted, and POW camp commanders continuously requested reinforcements. As expressed by the commander of the POW camp 6, the qualifications for the tasks of barrack interpreters were reduced to the minimum:

*Since our camp is still experiencing a shortage of barrack interpreters, i.e. such Russian-speaking persons who are in the barracks daily in direct contact with the prisoners-of-war, and are present when a prisoner-of-war is sent to work, I request that another five of them would be relocated to our camp. The present equivalent interpreter staff is mostly over-aged, in poor health and tired because of lack of sleep and excessive work – about which they have many times complained to me – and thus, the reinforcements I am requesting for our camp would be vital. These tasks are suitable even for persons with the most insufficient education who are proficient in the Russian language.<sup>11</sup>*

### **Duties and position of POW camp interpreters**

In the beginning of the Continuation War, the duties of the camp interpreters had not yet been clearly defined. Given the lack of a uniform code of conduct, each POW camp had its own code, which also determined the tasks of the interpreter. POW camp commanders drafted their suggestions for the code of conduct including the job descriptions for each personnel category, but these were later replaced by the code of conduct given on 18 August 1941 by Colonel H. Kalm, the commander of POW sorting camp 2. This code, a custom-made document for the HTS (cf. Pietola 1987: 67), defined the duties of a camp interpreter as follows:

1. *Acts as an interpreter.*
2. *During the day, goes at least twice an hour into the barrack to inquire if an interpreter is needed.*
3. *The duty of an assigned interpreter is to remain in the sorting office during the day, so that he can be used for different tasks if required, for example as an interpreter at a work site etc.*
4. *During the 24 hours the interpreter is on call, he stays in the barrack office.*
5. *On duty, the interpreter must be armed.<sup>12</sup>*

The camp interpreters had varying roles within the camp and were occasionally used for guarding tasks as well. As indicated by the above code, some interpreters mediated as “barrack interpreters” in barracks and POW work sites. Others than those officially assigned as interpreters, however, also performed such mediation tasks. Despite the specific job description, the duties of all linguistically competent personnel varied between prisoner card register indexing, interpreting and interrogation. On occasion even the interrogators assigned by headquarters had the obligation to interpret, a task

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<sup>11</sup> POW camp 6 to HTS 3.12.41. HTS-POC 25.11.–10.12.1941 Fa7/VIIc/5, KA.

<sup>12</sup> Code of Conduct in POW sorting camp 2 18.8.1941. HTS-POC 23.6.–11.9.1941 Fa 1, KA.

that is represented in the consulted sources as inferior to their main role: According to the HQ intelligence, the main duty of their interrogators was “to interrogate prisoners-of-war and to inform the HQ intelligence of the results”. As their time permitted, they could also be engaged “as interpreters and as managers of the edifying activities among the prisoners-of-war”. This early policy entered later into the ‘POW interrogation guide’ of the Finnish Defence Forces (*Sotavankien kuulusteluopas*, 1943) that specified the measures in the handling of POWs.

One of the central tasks of the linguistically competent camp personnel involved the maintenance of the prisoner registry prescribed by the International Red Cross. Keeping a prisoner card index up-to-date was the most strenuous at sorting camps, where prisoners were issued a prisoner card prior to their transfer to other POW formations. The extension of the task in relation to the available camp personnel and to the quality of their work occasionally led to arguments between the camp commanders, the HTS and headquarters. The interpreters’ work did not evoke any strong emotions, but irritation was stirred up by the specific, comfortable status and unsatisfactory performance of the interrogators sent out by the HQ intelligence. The transliteration of prisoners’ names as well as the first entries in camp interrogation cards and prisoner cards were often so neglectful that checking, completing and copying the register cards in the condition required by the Red Cross alone took the entire time of the other registry staff. The commander of POW sorting camp 2, Colonel Kalm, illustrated rather bitterly that “[a]s a result, the camp command is now mainly in the service of the interrogators. Even the only typewriter we have is not often available for use in camp matters”.<sup>13</sup>

Further irritation and protests were caused by interpreters’ detachments to interrogator courses. After the successful completion of the course, the interpreter was usually transferred as interrogator under the HQ’s command, and this job rotation only deteriorated the already unbearable situation illustrated above. In December 1941, for example, sorting camp 1 was confronted with very difficult circumstances, as out of the 11 people working at the registry, three had been discharged due to illness or advanced age, two had been transferred elsewhere and another two detached to the HQ interrogator course. As another person was to be discharged shortly as well, the registry was about to be left with only three employees. As the camp commander’s protest indicates, such a job rotation severely hampered the language management and the general efficiency of the POW camps:

*With this strength it is impossible to keep the card index up to date. The prisoner cards, the filling of which the Red Cross considers quite important, are in many cases left completely unfilled during the short period that the prisoners-of-war have to spend at our camp. Similarly, it is not possible to manage the transit of prisoners-of-war, which at least requires list-keepers proficient in the Russian language, at the necessary haste. In order to keep the prisoner registry in the required condition, commanding the registry personnel for example to the interrogator course should be*

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<sup>13</sup> POW sorting camp 2 to HTS 29.8.41. HTS-POC 27.8.-29.9.1941 Fa 4/VI/5, KA.

*avoided until another person has been sent to the camp to take over the registry duties of the man to be commanded to the course.*<sup>14</sup>

As persons proficient in Russian were stationed and engaged wherever there was urgent need – for example as “registry staff” or “interpreter” – and all these assignments apparently were strongly overlapping, the definition of the general or individual duties is not very straightforward. The same uncertainty holds for the mutual positions of interpreters and other linguistically skilled personnel in the camp hierarchy. For the efficiency of the camp, the interpreters obviously were a vital group, but their tasks and positions were not as explicitly defined as for example those of HQ’s interrogators. The civilians and reservists assigned to interpret usually acted at the camps as military civil servants wearing the uniform of a military civil servant. At the same time their military fitness class was often insufficient for front service and many of them lacked even basic military training, which is why, despite their importance in the camp, they did not always achieve a clearly recognized position in its structures. This general opacity of the interpreters’ tasks and position is reflected in the issues concerning their supply and chain of command.

#### ***Status of POW camp interpreters***

In the war zone, the management of POW camps was the responsibility of military units and, on the home front, the HTS. In July 1941, the HTS sent out an instruction to the POW camps that placed the interrogators, assigned by headquarters, under the authority of the camp commander: the orders to interrogate were only received from headquarters. In contrast to this, the chain of command for interpreters remained undefined.<sup>15</sup> The interrogators and interpreters, whom the HQ intelligence had provided for the army corps, were subordinate to these formations, both in service and supply.<sup>16</sup>

The interpreters’ salary was one of the crucial maintenance issues and from the beginning indicative of their recognition. In July 1941, the HTS informed the interpreter of POW camp 19 in Kiuruvesi, Antti Walfrid Telle, stating “that the salary of an interpreter is the same as that of a standby reservist. If he has a military rank, it will determine his salary.”<sup>17</sup> For camp commanders, however, the guideline was far from unambiguous. On 12 September 1941, the commander of POW camp 12, Lieutenant P. Salovaara, sent a letter to the HTS asking for the same briefing about the salary of interpreter NCOs that the personnel of POW camp 20 had received. In its response, the HTS informed commander Salovaara “that no particular briefing about the salary of interpreter NCOs has been sent. The interpreters are paid according to their military rank. Special orders have been given about the salary of HQ interrogators.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> POW sorting camp 1 to HTS 1b 2.12.41. *HTS-POC* 10.12.1941, Fa 8/8, KA.

<sup>15</sup> HTS to POW camps 3.7.41. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1, KA.

<sup>16</sup> HQ intelligence to HTS 6.7.1941. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1/II/5, KA.

<sup>17</sup> Alfrid Telle to HTS 28.7.1941. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941 Fa 1, KA.

<sup>18</sup> POW Camp 12 to HTS 12.9.1941; HTS to POW camp 12 17.9.41. *HTS-POC* 27.8.-29.9.1941, Fa 4 /VI/5, KA.

According to the HQ instructions, the salary of a POW camp interpreter who had been born before the year 1897 and exempted from military service was equal to that of an interrogator, i.e. 1,750 Finnish marks, in addition to which the daily allowance of a military civil servant was to be paid. The salary and daily allowance of those born in 1897 or later was based on their military rank. The preconditions for the salary, however, caused much confusion, and in January 1942, the HTS was still regularly receiving inquiries about the salaries and daily allowances of volunteer interpreters from standby reserves.<sup>19</sup> The remuneration issue remained so unclear that the Civil Guard districts, POW camps and military hospitals finally received a copy of the HQ briefing with detailed comments.<sup>20</sup>

The persistent shortage of interpreters was a problem which induced price competition between the POW camps and labor sites. The HTS forwarded to the HQ sorting unit a notice from the POW camp 6 complaining that the Vyborg construction site, subordinated to the HQ fortification unit, recruited interpreters from the POW camp and offered a salary higher than that specified in the HQ instructions. In order to better control an already difficult situation, the HTS requested guidelines for similar cases.<sup>21</sup> The claim about the higher salary apparently was correct, as for example the salary of Elias Vartiainen, who was hired in November 1941 as an interpreter for POW company 31, was 2,400 Finnish marks. In addition, he was entitled to free meals. Vartiainen's salary was in accordance with the HQ instructions for the POW companies of the fortification unit. On the salary scale for POW companies' personnel sent in October 1941, the salary of an interpreter was 2,000–3,500 Finnish marks.<sup>22</sup>

Contradictory guidelines sent out by different HQ units together with the shortage of Russian-speaking personnel gave the interpreters an opportunity to “extort” for better benefits. In March 1942, the HTS turned again to the HQ sorting unit and drew attention to the consequences of conflicting orders as regards the interpreters' and interrogators benefits:

*Recruiting qualified interrogators and interpreters with the present salary has proved difficult and even the interrogators and interpreters currently in service, if they were to continue in service, are hoping for an improvement in their salary in the form of free army meals.*

*The contradictory orders have led to a situation in which POW interrogators in some POW hospitals have been promised meals in addition to salary, and when the*

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<sup>19</sup> Boris Semenoff to HTS 4.11.1941; HTS to Semenoff 12.11.41. HTS-POC 24.10.–11.11.1941 Fa 6/VIIa/5, KA.

<sup>20</sup> HTS 26.1.1942. Svl. 22. Yleinen kirjeenvaihto [POW camp 22, open mail] 1942. Perus 10114/2 [9], KA.

<sup>21</sup> HTS to HQ 1.11.41. HTS-POC 24.10.–11.11.1941, Fa 6/VIIa/5, KA.

<sup>22</sup> I Army Corps 4 L31 to POW companies 20.12.1941; HQ Fortification unit L31 to POW companies 16.10.1941. Saapuneet salaiset kirjelmät [Incoming mail] 1941, T 11498/23 L31, KA.

*meals are denied following the latest orders, they are planning to leave their position.*<sup>23</sup>

The General Intendant's office reply to the HQ intelligence unit favored the interpreters, stating that "POW interrogators, interpreters and such can, for the time being and until further notice, be given free meals and quarters provided by the defence forces, but not clothing".<sup>24</sup>

Less than a month later, the HQ General Intendant's office gave the HTS new instructions concerning the clothing of POW interrogators and interpreters:

*On account of the HTS proposal mentioned at the beginning, I have negotiated with the commander of the General Staff and he has stated that in his opinion the hired persons not included in the personnel strength can be provided with the necessary military clothes only if they operate in the war zone. Consequently, the POW interrogators and interpreters serving in military formations can only be provided with the following pieces of clothing: a tunic, a pair of trousers, a pair of footwear, a leather belt, a cap, a cockade and a coat. On the other hand, military clothing is not necessary for similar persons acting at the POW camps on the home front, and thus the pieces of military clothing that may have been given to them must be taken away.*<sup>25</sup>

From the viewpoint of the interpreter's position, the official guidelines are interesting. In the war zone, the interpreters' clothing declared them as part of the personnel strength and the unit performing military operations. The others, in this case the POW camp interpreters, were supposed to wear their civilian clothes and were thus, symbolically, distanced from the other POW camp administration. From the viewpoint of a captured soldier experiencing the different stages of imprisonment and mediation, the interpreters in the war zone were enemies, whereas the POW camp interpreters may have been, in their eyes, certainly not neutral, but eventually occupying some sort of middle ground – not "us" but not entirely "them" either (cf. BAKER 2010).

### ***Interpreter – a potential enemy agent?***

The role and duties of an interpreter are often associated with, both in common everyday discourse and in the ethical guidelines for interpreters, neutrality and impartiality: the interpreter is assumed or represented as an intermediary who does not take the side of either of the interpreted parties. This epistemological view of interpreters' or translators' mediation services, or the very possibility thereof, have, of course, been contested with observations from different socio-cultural translation spaces of past and present (e.g. STAHLJAK 2000; PÖLLABAUER 2006; INGHILLERI 2005 and 2008). Wars and conflicts feature prototypical examples of contexts in which the specific physical, inhuman and violent reality, narratives, and goals for translation activities seriously constrain the assumed neutrality of the interpreter's agency (see e.g.

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<sup>23</sup> HTS to HQ sorting unit 18.3.42. HTS-POC 24.3.–8.4.1942, Fa 13/VII j/4, KA.

<sup>24</sup> HQ General Intendant's office to HTS 28.3.1942. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> HQ General Intendant's office to HTS 12.4.1942. Ibid.



STAHULJAK 1999; KAHANE 2007; BAKER 2010; SNELLMAN 2016). Under these conditions, interpreters may be forced to choose sides, or may choose to define their own translational practice in terms other than neutrality.

As pointed out above, the military uniform already associated the interpreter with one of the sides, either “us” or “them”, depending on the point of view. In addition to this, however, the figure of the interpreter also embodied the schizophrenic attitudes towards persons who knew the language and culture of the enemy well enough to be both indispensable and suspicious (for similar examples of British attitudes towards “friendly” or “enemy aliens” see FOOTITT & TOBIA 2013: 23-27). And as it is typical of a situation in which interpreters are required that other parties are not able to control the interpreted content, the trustworthiness of interpreters needed to be verified in advance with other means. If, as can be inferred from the consulted documents, language proficiency and trust comprised the main criteria in recruiting interpreters, then it was the latter criterion that was established more systematically than the former. Ultimately, what was at stake was the interpreter’s loyalty to one’s own troops and to the narrative framework of the ongoing war, a criterion catalogue not dissimilar to the one adopted at the same time in Great Britain (see e.g. FOOTITT 2012b: 20-26).

Despite the constant shortage of interpreters, their recruitment stayed under the strict control of the HTS. The candidates’ suitability for the task was confirmed before their deployment, and in individual cases even the background of already engaged interpreters could be checked. In this reliability and background checking, the HTS usually consulted the Finnish Secret Police. For example in June 1941, the HTS ordered the military hospital 28 in Kokkola (for details see WESTERLUND 2008b: 35) to deliver a list of its Russian-speaking interpreters with all personal details, so that the HTS would be able “to establish the persons’ suitability for their tasks”.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in November 1941, the HTS requested that the Finnish Secret Police evaluate the national reliability of an interpreter at Miehikkälä labour camp.<sup>27</sup> The hand-written notes such as “cannot be used” that frequently appear in the HTS name lists are indicative of the fact that the interpreters suggested by the Civil Guard districts could also be sent back home, and yet it is difficult to establish whether the judgement was based on reliability or other issues. In some cases, the notes state unequivocally “over-aged”, referring to a criterion that was adopted in a much more relaxed manner in the later stages of war as several comments such as “will be assigned if the person in question agrees to it, being over-aged” suggest.

Another military instance investigating the reliability of interpreters was the Counter-Intelligence Office of the HQ surveillance unit. For example in spring 1942 it informed the HTS of an interpreter, “whose deployment in similar tasks is not recommended”. According to the information letter, the interpreter had made himself guilty of spreading false rumours about coming Red Army attacks among Russian POWs. In addition to this, the interpreter had brought political literature to the pris-

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<sup>26</sup> HTS to Military Hospital 28 30.6.41. *HTS-POC* 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1/II/5, KA.

<sup>27</sup> HTS to Secret Police 19.11.41. *HTS-POC* 24.10.–11.11.1941 Fa 6/VIIa/7, KA.

oners, accepted money from a Russian female captive for extra foodstuffs, and had revealed that his brothers and sons were serving in the Red Army.<sup>28</sup>

Although the aim was to attest and ensure the reliability of interpreters before their deployment, the possibility nevertheless existed that a “Bolshevik agent” could infiltrate a POW camp. In December 1941, “for a reason that has come up”, the POW camp commanders were advised to monitor that such persons could not infiltrate the camp interpreters or other Russian-speaking personnel:

*Usually the necessary reliability information on this kind of personnel is obtained beforehand, but there may be cases in which a person who has been thought politically reliable lets the enemy agents lure him into trying to enter service at a prisoner-of-war camp with a specific objective. The enemy might also persuade a weak-minded person working at a prisoner camp to acquire information crucial to the enemy and to perform agitation.*<sup>29</sup>

Assessments of trustworthiness are rare in the archived documents, but the records contain letters about a denunciation of an interpreter that demonstrate how humanity towards enemy prisoners could raise questions about the interpreter’s reliability and personal integrity. In January 1942, the Finnish Secret Police notified the HTS “for future measures” that they had received information about an interpreter who was favouring prisoners. The interpreter was accused of providing food and clothes to POWs and condemning their punishments by saying that “there might come a time when the tables are turned”. The Secret Police also confirmed the claim according to which the interpreter advocated “leftist ideology” in other ways, too. Empathy with a miserable destiny had turned against the interpreter.<sup>30</sup>

There are reasons to assume that, in the extreme conditions of POW formations, close relationships would form between interpreters and prisoners over time. At the work sites, the interpreters had an opportunity to socialize with the POWs and perhaps, at the same time, present their views. In spring 1943, the staff of the Karelian Army Corps deemed it necessary to intervene in the activities of interpreters by briefing the POW company commanders with the following reminder:

*Certain interpreters in prisoner-of-war companies have been guilty of fraternising with prisoners-of-war e.g. by explaining newspaper war reporting and other such matters which must be regarded forbidden for the prisoners-of-war. The company commanders are responsible for the actions of their interpreters and they themselves*

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<sup>28</sup> HQ counter intelligence office to HTS 22.4.42. HTS-POC 23.4.–6.5.1942, Fa 15/VII I/5, KA.

<sup>29</sup> HTS to POW camp commanders 17.12.1941. Svl. 22. Yleinen ja salainen kirjeenvaihto sekä muut asiakirjat [POW camp 22, open and secret mail and other documents] 1941–1942. Perus 10114/2 [8] I/II, KA.

<sup>30</sup> Secret Police to HTS 3.1.1942; HTS to Secret Police 5.1.42. HTS-POC 2.1.-17.1.1942/ Fa9 /16, KA.

*must explain to the interpreters why they are in the company and what their tasks involve.*<sup>31</sup>

The general order advised interpreters to forward all inquiries from the POWs to the commanders, who would answer them if deemed appropriate. With a task list at the end of the letter, the interpreters once again received a reminder of their tasks and responsibilities.

### **The unknown interpreting prisoners**

The first few months of the Continuation War already showed that the number of soldiers and civilians with appropriate language skills for interpreting was far too small in relation to the number of POWs and the need for interpreting. This forced the HTS and the POW formations under its authority to resort to POWs with the most elementary Finnish skills to help convey to fellow inmates the necessary prison commands at the POW camps and workplaces. Recourse to the language skills of the enemy, however, was not merely a phenomenon of POW formations but soon became one essential part of the translation culture of the entire defence forces during the Continuation War. According to Kujansuu, there were many prisoners in the Finnish units whom the front troops had engaged in the occupied area either as a POW or a civilian. At first, they usually acted as interpreters. Later they were enlisted and paid the daily allowance of a Finnish soldier. In many cases, these prisoners never appeared in the POW registers requested by the Red Cross (cf. KUJANSUU 1999: 177).

This archival invisibility holds for the HTS material as well: interpreting prisoners-of-war remain anonymous and their backgrounds hidden in figures and lists in diverse documents received or sent by the staff. One of the rare exceptions is the letter issued by prisoner J. Fadejev from January 1942, in which he pleads to the HTS for release from the POW camp, either home or to a civilian internment camp. Judging by the cover letter, Fadejev was imprisoned in POW camp 16 and, at the time of his writing, acting as an interpreter for a POW subordinated to the Suojärvi military administration in Eastern Karelia. In his letter, Fadejev describes his family relations in Viena Karelia (Siesjärvi district) and the destinies of the family under the Soviet regime. At the end of his plea, Fadejev illustrates how he ended up as a POW without ever taking up arms:

*[...] and thus, I had to hide at a logging site as a foreman from which job I was captured, that is, to the first army draft I did not have to go since I was in Belarus getting loggers. But after returning they [the Soviets] put me in forced labour rafting timber and building bridges, from where I escaped and was captured by the Finnish bicycle patrol on 24 July 41. After that and even now I am an interpreter among the*

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<sup>31</sup> Karelian Army Corps, fortification unit to commanders of POW companies 8.3.43. *Sotavankimuodostelmat 1941-1944, salainen kirjeenvaihto* [POW formations 1941-1944, secret mail] T11498/13 I/IV t.

*soldier-prisoners, but I am asking, if possible, please let me go home or to a civilian prisoner camp because it feels adverse to me to stay with the soldier-prisoners.*<sup>32</sup>

Fadejev was one of the East Karelian, Ingrian and Estonian POWs who were needed as interpreters at camps and work sites, foremen assistants and barrack elders. For example, the code of conduct for sorting camp 2 specified as early as in August 1941 that one of the tasks of a Russian barrack elder was to “act as an interpreter when needed, if he is able” and “convey to the prisoners in the barrack all the commands, orders and instructions given.”<sup>33</sup> The reasons seem obvious: lack of language skills in the communication between the POWs and their guards could lead to misunderstandings and unprovoked assaults when the guards interpreted misunderstandings as general insubordination by the POWs. Communication problems at work sites also manifested themselves in lower work efficiency. Similar Orders of the Day, which stated that each barrack should have a POW fluent in Finnish to lower the language barrier between the guards and the POWs, were issued during the following winter in many other POW formations (cf. Kujansuu 1999: 84). The POWs were, from the very establishment of the camp network, a crucial part of its multilingual resources which the POW unit commanders held tightly onto when necessary.

#### ***Arguments about the translational resources***

In September 1941, the HTS gave the POW camps an order to immediately send to POW camp 21 located in Aholampi, Sääminki (nowadays Savonlinna)

*those prisoners-of-war in their possession belonging to group C, who come from East Karelia, Ingria, the Vepsian region, Estonia and Tver and Novgorod oblasts whose spoken Finnish is good or elementary. These do not include Mordovians, Maris who do not know any Finnish, nor officers, political commissars, Communist party leaders nor Finnish-born persons who have moved to Russia.*<sup>34</sup>

POW camp 21 had been moved to Aholampi by an order of the headquarters in mid-September (cf. WESTERLUND 2008b: 100) and the aim was to gather there all the Finnish-speaking POWs who could be turned into “decent Finnish citizens, mainly to be used to populate East Karelia”.<sup>35</sup> The policy excluded the Finnish-born POWs who had moved or fled to Russia after the Finnish Civil War, along with Soviet officers, political commissars and Communist party leaders, and as such followed an explicit military strategy as well as culture-political goals of the Finnish administration. In the founding orders of the camps, and in the later POW relocation orders, the camps were given permission to keep “some number of interpreters out of the prisoners-of-war mentioned above, if it is separately arranged with the Home Troops Staff Sorting 1B.” The POWs who were selected to remain at the camps as interpret-

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<sup>32</sup> POW camp 16 to HTS 7.1.42. HTS-POC 2.1.–17.1.1942, Fa 9/16, KA.

<sup>33</sup> Code of command in POW sorting camp 2 18.8.1941. HTS-POC 23.6.–11.9.1941, Fa 1, KA.

<sup>34</sup> HTS 23.9.41. HTS-POC 27.8.–29.9.1941, Fa 4/VI/1, KA.

<sup>35</sup> HTS 19.9.41. Ibid.

ers had to be “separated at camps and quarters from Russian prisoners-of-war and it must be ensured that their education is not neglected.”<sup>36</sup>

The commanders of the POW camps responded to the relocation order immediately by stating that the Finnish-speaking POWs were indispensable and should preferably remain at the camp. For example, the commander of POW camp 12, Lieutenant P. Salovaara, issued on 24 September 1941 a letter in which he refers to six Ingrian and seven East Karelian Finnish-speaking POWs at his camp:

*These Finnish-speaking prisoners-of-war have been used at the camp as work site interpreters and foreman assistants, and at each subcamp they have been given private lodgings and in other ways as well they have received special treatment. At the camp there is one other Finnish-speaking prisoner-of-war who comes from Tver oblast, and he has stated that he is Russian and has learned Finnish (rudimentary) in prison with Finnish prisoners, and yet another prisoner-of-war, born of a Russian father and a Finnish mother, who moved to Russia during the red uprising, but his Finnish skills are very poor.*

Lieutenant Salovaara described furthermore that, due to harvest, the camp was divided into several separate subcamps and working groups, in which all mentioned interpreters were much needed. The two persons in the camp personnel with Russian skills, the chief supply officer and the interpreter NCO, were already overstrained, on which grounds Salovaara requested that POW camp 12 would still be allowed to keep its Finnish-speaking prisoners-of-war.<sup>37</sup>

The use of POW interpreters was soon standard practice not only in POW camps but also at their work sites often scattered further away from the camps. For example, at a state railway construction site close to the POW Camp 9, 20 prisoners were engaged as interpreters for 1,047 POW workers, in other words one POW interpreter for 50 prisoners.<sup>38</sup> In October 1941, the order of the HQ fortification unit included Karelian and Ingrian POWs as interpreters in the basic strength of a POW company and a Finnish command squad instructing three interpreters for 180 prisoners.<sup>39</sup> The same HQ order also gave clear instructions for rewarding the POWs: as compensation for their work, the POWs would enjoy better treatment including larger allowances of cigarettes, sugar and bread. They could also be granted a superior position among the prisoners.

The downside of such benefits was the obvious risk. The mere act of helping the enemy, but particularly the superior position brought with it, was quickly judged as betrayal which might cost the interpreters and barrack elders their lives – whether in the unofficial courts of the POW camp or in the post-war purging (cf. WESTERLUND 2008a: 254; FROLOV 2004: 37). The post-war Soviet courts were harsh on those who interpreted for Finns. For example, among the prisoners that the Finnish minister of the interior, Yrjö Leino, secretly handed over to the Soviet representatives of the Al-

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<sup>36</sup> HTS 23.9.41. Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> POW camp 12 to HTS 24.9.41. Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> POW camp 9 to HTS 24.9.-41. Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> HQ fortification unit 6.10.41. HTS-POC 26.9.–24.10.1941, Fa 5/VII/6, KA.

lied Control Commission in Finland in 1948, there were many Finnish citizens (earlier Russian White Emigrants) or persons with a Nansen passport that had been engaged in translating and interpreting in different military units, including POW camps, and were later deported to Siberia on account of anti-Soviet collaboration with the enemy (cf. KAUPPALA 2011: 31, 48, 252, 256 and 365).

POW interpreters became an indispensable linguistic resource, comparable to other POW labor in the structures of a country at war, a resource whose engagement apparently called for centralized control. In November 1941, the HTS requested that the POW camps report how many POWs of a certain occupation there were at the camp. The purpose was likely to distribute those in possession of special skills evenly among the camps. The commander of the aforementioned POW camp 12 supplied on 28 November 1941 a list in which the twenty interpreters were interestingly paralleled with the other skilled craftpersons such as carpenters, plasterers, electricians, joiners, painters, cobblers or blacksmiths. However, there is reason to assume that in this list at least “interpreter” featured a task that a prisoner was assigned to at the camp because of his sufficient language skills, rather than an occupation based on earlier experience, skills or even training.<sup>40</sup>

The other prisoner camps provided similar reports. Some of them do not refer to interpreters, while in others the comment “interpreters cannot be handed over” emerges frequently, thus leaving the impression that the POW camps withheld the Finnish-speaking prisoners for their own use. The HTS nevertheless was convinced that the camps held too many Finnish-speaking POWs, and in January 1942 it repeated the order to transfer excess POWs to POW camp 21 in Aholampi, Savonlinna.<sup>41</sup> The POW interpreters had quickly become a permanent part of the multilingual resources of the POW administration that the HTS wanted to keep under its control.

### **The interpreting POW – a resource or a risk?**

It is difficult to estimate whether prisoner-interpreters ever were subject to a similar security clearance as the Finnish interpreters. Our sources reveal very little about the issue. In the HTS correspondence, however, there is a letter addressed to the HQ illustrating how, in the light of statistics, insubordination as well as work refusal were notably more common amongst the Finno-Ugric POWs than other POWs. The letter ends with an observation based on the statements of POW camps and military hospitals that “there are very few completely reliable Finno-Ugric POWs”.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this, the correspondence between the HTS and the POW camps seems to suggest that the conclusion does not hold true for those Finno-Ugric POWs who acted as interpreters; their work apparently gave no reason to admonish them.<sup>43</sup> The use of enemy interpreters was governed by practical necessity and the interpreters could possibly

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<sup>40</sup> POW camp 12 to HTS 28.11.1941. *HTS-POC* 25.11.–10.12.1941, Fa 7/VIIc/4, KA.

<sup>41</sup> HTS to POW sorting camps 1, 2 as well as to POW camps 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 22 3.1.1942. *HTS-POC* 2.1.–17.1.1942, Fa 9/VIIe/4, KA.

<sup>42</sup> HTS to HQ 28.7.1943. *HTS-POC* 23.7.–25.8.1943, Fa 30/13, KA.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. POW camp 8 20.7.1943, POW camp 9 22.7.1943 and POW camp 19 22.8.1943 to HTS. *Ibid.*



only be warned of the consequences of unreliable or manipulative interpretation. Some POW interpreters were forced to make a choice between becoming an informer and execution, and a similar death threat was probably also present in the recruitment of interpreters and determined their actions.

Trust in the POW interpreters was still evident. The correspondence of the HTS POW office contains several copies of the investigation reports by the surveillance office of the East Karelia Military Administration Staff, in which “a POW was present as an interpreter and a witness” in the interrogation.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Pietola (1987: 227–228) has shown that the HQ surveillance recruited POWs to act at the POW camps as surveillance agents, that is, as informers. Officially they worked as interpreters, caretakers and in other such tasks in which they could come into contact with the other prisoners. With their help, the HQ surveillance was able to arrest more than 1,300 Soviet military persons as “political figures”. (On the post-war fates of these “friendly enemy aliens”, see also KAUPPALA 2011: 253.)

The Finnish skills of the POW interpreters may have led some to forget that, despite the language, they were enemies whose actions needed particular monitoring. The POW camp commanders were urged to pay special attention to those POWs who spoke or knew Finnish and who acted as interpreters or in other positions of trust:

*Among these prisoners-of-war there might be spies or agitators trained by the enemy who can cause a lot of disturbance. The fact that a prisoner-of-war speaks Finnish does not always justify granting him a special position unless his reliability has been properly verified. [...] While dealing with these prisoners it needs to be remembered that they have been raised under the Bolshevik command, and they do not know any other modes of society than the Communist one, whose superiority has been harped on them for years on end.*<sup>45</sup>

It is understandable that a POW interpreter who had proved reliable and was fluent in Finnish was occasionally seen more as one of “us” than “them”, the enemy. Even the POWs themselves might occasionally identify themselves with the Finns in their effort to position themselves in the space of multiple affinities (see KUJAMÄKI 2015).

## Conclusion

The above descriptive discussion of the correspondence dealing with the organization and practice of interpreting in the social spaces of POW formations suggests a *translation culture* that developed itself both top-down and bottom-up. The Home Troops Staff (HTS), authorized by the Finnish Military Headquarters, defined the basic structures and resources for the handling of POWs and the multilingualism of POW formations and tried to control centrally the recruitment and deployment as

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<sup>44</sup> E.g. East Karelian Military Administration Staff, Protocoll Nr. 304/42 plus attachment HTS-POC 9.4.-23.4.1942, Fa 14/VII k/4, KA.

<sup>45</sup> HTS to POW camps and military hospitals 17.12.1941. Svl. 22. *Yleinen ja salainen kirjeenvaihto sekä muut asiakirjat* [POW camp 22, open and secret mail and other documents] 1941–1942. Perus 10114/2 [8] I/II, KA.

well as the actual daily work of their staff, including interpreters and other Russian-speaking personnel. As regards interpreting, however, the resources allocated to the camps were insufficient from the start in relation to the actual need, which seriously constrained the handling of Red Army captives, as for example requested by the International Red Cross, as well as the communication in camps and work sites. Because of this, the camp commanders were encouraged to look for reinforcements among camp inmates that could fill in the communicative gaps. While the anonymous POW interpreters became a standard resource of the translational structures, the HTS also tried to steer their usage in camps and control their education into “decent Finnish citizens” for the occupied areas of Eastern Karelia. What is more, the particular codes of conduct for interpreters were drafted at the lower camp level, too, until the HTS started to control the use and tasks of camp interpreters.

The top-down and bottom-up processes created a translation culture that comprised two basic categories of actors, both of them with a particular framework of qualifications and trust issues. On the one hand, there were the *enlisted interpreters* recruited by the HTS, who were subject to a set of security measures that, on the other hand, were not systematically at work in the selection of *prisoner interpreters* from the Red Army captives. In the first group, the interpreters were entitled to a monthly salary and a daily allowance as a remuneration for their mediation services based often only on elementary or satisfactory knowledge of Russian. In the second, the prisoners mediated in barracks or work sites with the help of their elementary Finnish, and received bread, cigarettes and a social status for their “services”, a status that under violent camp conditions was not entirely free of risk.

In addition to insufficiency of resources, further features of the translation culture in POW camps entail temporality, uncertainty, fragility and paranoia. Due to the limited availability of Russian-speaking personnel and the age structure of enlisted persons, the mediation structures were temporal and extremely vulnerable to changes that perpetually constrained the POW camp staffs’ efficiency. The official guidelines were often controversial and in constant flux, leading to different interpretations of the interpreters’ position, rights and responsibilities. At the same time, on a more general level, ‘temporality’ also alludes to the force of military conflicts to create short- or longer-living intercultural spaces, in which linguistically versed persons were temporarily willing or obliged to take up interpreting tasks that they had not been engaged with before the war and that they probably never returned to after the war. Finally, while even the most modest knowledge of enemy language and culture could make a person vital to the military, in the context of military confrontations suspicion and paranoia always framed his or her agency.

The archived records consulted for this research shed light on the functions and narratives of institutions and persons that were responsible for the constitution of translational structures, but tell little about the actual experiences of interpreters in the inhuman conditions of the POW camps. This makes our reconstruction unavoidably incomplete. To complete the picture, the records should be associated more strongly with voices of persons that embodied the actual mediation space. In this search for

first-hand oral history, however, we are running out of time. If not recorded already, the personal narratives will remind behind the veil of silence and oblivion.

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